

WHEELRIGHTS' RESPONSE TO SW WALES REGIONAL TRANSPORT PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Wheelrights is Swansea Bay's Cycling campaign group. We have been active for over 25 years and currently have 82 members who support our aim to increase cycling provision for everyday journeys in the Swansea Bay area. Transport is all about the movement of people and goods. We are especially concerned about the benefits of active travel for physical and mental health as well as its contribution to reaching the Net Zero goal for Wales.

We commented extensively on the case for change produced in 2024 and many of the same comments will now be reiterated in this response. A large-scale consultation was undertaken by Arcadis on behalf of the Consultative Joint Committee and we were very surprised that Active Travel organisations like ourselves were not seen as important enough for a stakeholder meeting, until just 3 days ago! The consultation process itself appears to have heavily favoured certain sections of the population. Over 50% of responses came from those people aged between 50 and 74 years of age whilst there was not a single response for those under 17. Great caution should be attached to any messages from this consultation report.

Recommendation 1 – the CJC needs to urgently engage children and young people (under 24 years of age) directly through Schools' councils, Colleges, Universities and work places.

DRAFT REGIONAL TRANSPORT PLAN

The plan begins with a good summary of the aims of Llwybr Newydd, The National Transport Plan and Net Zero Wales, which need to be the guiding light behind this document. The importance of modal shift is emphasised in many sections of the plan and this is to be welcomed. However, the targets for modal shift set in the plans above are not mentioned as being part of any strategy.

Recommendation 2 – The plan must include the national targets based on the data that will be delivered by the National Transport Survey that has just been announced.

Recommendation 3 – Each Local Authority should have a modal shift target set annually and monitored by TfW.

We note that the report starts from a point of view of the existing transport system, emphasising the road and rail system. Although Active Travel Network maps were approved for each Council in 2022, there is no analysis of how much of this network has been delivered. We also note that while travel to work data has been included, the plan needs to take a much more people focussed approach to movement. There needs to be an analysis, for example, of education journeys (to school, colleges, universities), health journeys (to surgeries, hospitals), shopping trips (to town centres and retail parks) and Leisure activities. We know that nationally that 25% of all journeys are under 1 mile and 71 pc of journeys are less than 5 miles. These are journeys that are easily accomplished by walking and wheeling respectively. Surprisingly, the plan has no specific recommendations for improving the number of walking journeys yet we know that this is the second most used travel mode. Currently the region appears to have no low traffic neighbourhoods, no school zones nor pavement parking enforcement. Pedestrians and 'wheelers' have complained over many years of the uneven standard of the pavements and the innumerable obstacles that hinder rather than promote walking. Examples of these include narrow widths, protruding trees roots, poor road crossings with islands, foot and cycle path barriers, wheelie bins and supermarket loading trolleys. Wheelrights welcomes the increase in travellers using scooters and e-bikes as very 'green' alternatives to the motor car, but note that very few AT routes are segregated to accommodate them. There seem to be no figures at all on the state of our pavements and how suitable they are for those with mobility issues.

Recommendation 4 – Journeys to school should be a priority and through surveys, schools, parents and children should work together to set active travel targets and publish the outcomes. Involving parents and children is one of the keys to future behaviour change.

Recommendation 5 – Each Council needs to undertake a survey of local residents to find out what actions would make for a better walking experience and then produce a strategy for how to increase walking trips based on the survey results and national and international research evidence.

Wheelrights welcomes the statement that ‘the current transport system is heavily car dependent’. Indeed, the last UK wide travel survey of journeys to work in 2011 showed that Swansea had the second highest car commuting rate for 65 of the UK largest cities. But the plan doesn’t outline any measures that might result in a drop in this figure. Truly, the private motor car is the elephant in the room for this region. The current road network is heavily weighted towards the use of the private car, rather than those who use other transport modes. We know that e-bike sales have risen sharply enabling longer journeys to be undertaken. However, almost all the arterial routes into our towns and cities lack proper cycle provision. This is especially important for women cyclists who cite safety on the road as the number one inhibiting factor for them. This plan does however promote the use of buses and we would warmly welcome this but point out that the number of services and timings need to improve dramatically. Swansea, for example has over the last decade seen a drop in the number of its bus lanes.

Recommendation 6 – That the CJC, TfW and Welsh Government undertake national and international research on what actions promote modal shift away from private cars.

Recommendation 7 – That there should be an assessment of the main arterial routes in the region to see how they could be redesigned to improve busing, cycling and walking rates. It may for example lead to the inside lane on some dual carriageways being given over to sustainable transport initiatives.

Recommendation 8 – The Children’s commissioner’s call for free public transport for under 18s should be supported and tested in a trial area. This would significantly reduce car use at the start and end of the school day and make cycling and walking easier and safer for all.

Wheelrights warmly welcomes the idea of the prioritisation tool developed with the help of TfW. In particular, the tool emphasises the need to take into account inequality through the use of the WIMD index. Research by Wheelrights shows that currently over 90% of those Swansea people who live in the Index’s top 10% have access to the cycle network. The figure for those in the bottom 10% is around 35%. The plan fails to acknowledge that those in the most deprived areas have the highest sustainable travel rates as they have lower car ownership rates. However, the poor bus service and lack of a safe cycling alternative leaves car ownership as the only ‘answer’ to their travel needs. In terms of behaviour change it is much easier to maintain a habit than change it, so getting residents to move from the car to other travel modes will be harder than increasing existing bus usage, walking and cycling.

Recommendation 9 – Priority in any sustainable travel funding decisions should be given to those in areas of greatest transport poverty.

Recommendation 10 – The points given to 2 car ownership in the Prioritisation Tool should be reviewed as this will only reinforce existing inequalities.

CONCLUSION

Whilst much of the plan is taken up with policies and objectives, there is no sense of how these policies and objectives will be delivered.

Recommendation 11 – Each local authority should be tasked with producing a 1 year, 2 year and 5 year Action Plan, to demonstrate who will be doing what and when to achieve the objectives. This Action Plan should be publicly available on each local authority’s website.

Wheelrights recognises that the 11 recommendations above need to be implemented in an uncertain financial future. It is also unfortunate that the region would appear to have the largest urban area in

Wales (by population) without any investment in Active Travel provision over the last 10 years. This leads to the last recommendation.

Recommendation 12 – That one demonstration town or district in the region should become an area where over 5 years, there is a full implementation of the factors that research shows will produce modal shift away from the private car.

John, Sayce
Wheelrights Chair
April 2025